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**Subject:** Truthout (3-21) Activists Cry Foul on the EPA's Dimock Water Test Announcement

## Fracking Fight: Activists Cry Foul on the EPA's Dimock Water Test Announcement

Tuesday, 20 March 2012

By Mike Ludwig, [Truthout](#) | Report

Anti-fracking activists lashed out at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last week after the agency released partial results of water tests taken from private wells in rural Dimock, Pennsylvania, where residents and activists are locked into an ongoing dispute with a gas drilling company accused of contaminating several families' wells while fracking in the area.

Amid a media controversy and public outcry, the EPA announced in January that it would test well water at 60 homes in Dimock to determine if the residents were being exposed to hazardous substances. On March 15, the EPA reported preliminary results showing that water in 11 homes were contaminated - but not at levels of health concern. Water at two homes tested positive for arsenic and water at six of homes contained sodium, methane, chromium and bacteria at levels the EPA considers to be safe for drinking water.

The EPA completed only a fraction of the testing it plans to do in Dimock, but industry groups and mainstream media outlets quickly jumped on the preliminary announcement as if it were proof that fracking was not to blame for Dimock's water troubles. Reuters, for example, ran a headline declaring that "fracking did not pollute water near homes" even though the EPA has not released the actual test results or drawn any conclusions from a study that has yet to be completed.

In a statement, the Sierra Club claimed, "the cry for clean water in Dimock was left unheard" and pledged to stand by the families there. Water Defense, an anti-fracking group supporting the residents of Dimock with dirty well water, accused the EPA of playing into the fracking industry's "spin machine" and "putting political expedience before the science and Dimock residents' health."

"We find it troublesome that the EPA would ever hint that the water is safe for use when there are still dangerous levels of methane in the water and this is only the preliminary results of the investigation," said Water Defense spokesperson Ana Tinsly.

Water Defense Director Claire Sandberg said the release left more questions than answered.

Sandberg wants to know why the EPA is handling the Dimock case differently than other fracking contamination cases, such as Pavillion, Wyoming, where the EPA did not release any results until after a year's worth of testing was complete. She said previous testing of Dimock well water found contaminants do not have safe levels established by the EPA, but are known to present health risks, such as naphthalene, phenanthrene, 2-methylnaphthalene and triethylene glycol.

Dimock has become a kind of ground zero for the national controversy over fracking, a drilling technique that is facilitating a natural gas boom, but has been linked to water contamination and earthquakes across the country.

The Dimock controversy began in 2008, when the wells used by several families were contaminated with chemicals and gas. In 2009, fracking firm Cabot Oil & Gas was fined \$120,000 for contaminating

the wells with methane while fracking underground.

There is now a moratorium on fracking in the area, but residents continue to complain about the murky water drawn from their wells. Eleven families, some of whom leased their gas rights to Cabot, are currently suing the company for contamination and working with activists to hold the company accountable.

Scott Ely is a plaintiff and one of the residents who received the preliminary results last week, which tested positive for arsenic, sodium and methane, among other contaminants. Ely told Truthout that several independent scientists have told him not to drink or bathe in the water, so he wasn't surprised by the results. The EPA, he said, plans to come to his home to go over the results and take more tests, so Ely was surprised to hear about the EPA's announcement.

"I was floored," said Ely, who told Truthout that the next day his well water was still murky and could be lit on fire due to its methane content.

Ely said he thought it was strange that the EPA's press release mentioned water test results from 11 families, and there are 11 families currently suing Cabot.

Cabot was under state order to deliver fresh drinking water in giant vessels to Ely and other Dimock residents until late November 2011 when state officials ruled the company could stop making water deliveries. Activists claimed that more than a dozen families were left without clean drinking water, prompting actor and Water Defense founder Mark Ruffalo and "Gasland" director Josh Fox to deliver tanks of water in a media blitz in December. The EPA is currently providing fresh water tanks to three of the homes where the agency is testing.

Cabot contends that it did not contaminate the wells and, like its activist rivals, has not been shy about drawing media attention. After President Obama called for safely expanding natural gas drilling in his State of the Union speech, Cabot CEO Dan Dinges sent a letter to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson saying the agency's investigation of water contamination in Dimock sends the wrong message about fracking and "undercut the president's commitment to this important resource."

This article is a Truthout original.

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